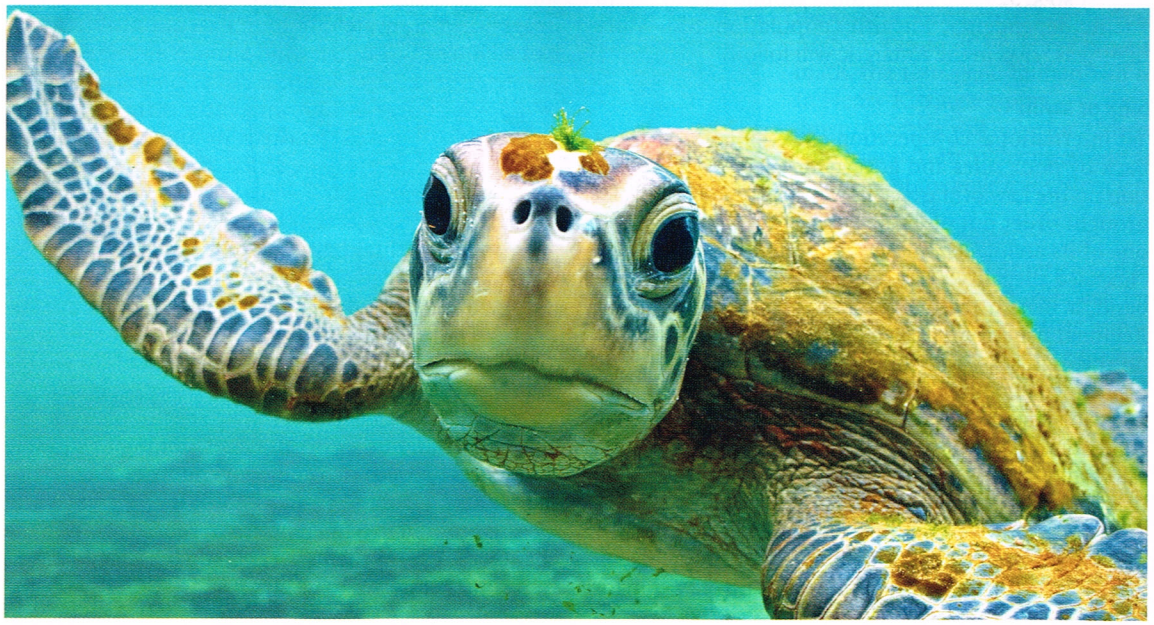
# International





## A sea of expectations

Dominic Ziegler

### The tide is turning in the oceans' fortunes

The newly invented trawl, so the peasants who petitioned the English king to ban it complained, "runs so heavily and hardly over the ground when fishing that it destroys the flowers of the land below water". Technology and ingenuity in hauling fish out of the sea continue to advance in leaps and bounds. But so too does the collateral damage of depleted fish stocks and trashed marine ecosystems. As those peasants showed, humans can be losers too. The coming year will prove momentous: alliances of politicians, environmentalists and even the fishing industry will put forward proposals that for the first time hold out a chance of reversing the degradation and restoring the sea to better health.

The world's total marine catch peaked in 1996, at 86.4m tonnes, and has gone down since, to 78.9m tonnes in 2011. The decline would have been sharper had not fishing fleets trawled ever farther and deeper in search of new stocks. Anyone for slimehead? You may be tempted if you see it on the menu as orange roughy. Yet the relentless hunt for fish means that the proportion of the world's fish stocks that are overexploited or depleted has risen from 10% in 1974 to over 30% today.

Waste and destruction on a grand scale are involved in getting fish protein on to humans' plates. Each day some 40,000 square kilometres (15,400 square miles) of seabed are scoured by bottom trawls, leaving dead zones which take decades to recover. Other techniques are not always better. In his book, "Ocean of Life", Callum Roberts of the University of York describes the collateral damage involving longlines (marketed as being more sea-friendly than nets) for catching mahi-mahi off Costa Rica. In catching only 211 mahi-mahi for the American market, the longliners left a carnage that included 468 olive ridley turtles, 20 endangered green turtles, 408 pelagic sting rays, 413 silky sharks, 68 Pacific sailfish and a host of other species—and supposedly on turtle-friendly hooks, too. Nor is aquaculture necessarily the answer. Salmon farms pour as much nitrogen into Scottish seas as the untreated sewage of a city of 3.2m. More effluent flows into the East and South China seas from shrimp ponds than from industry. And most of the feed in aquaculture comes from grinding up hauls of wild fish.

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The good news is the tremendous resilience of ocean ecosystems. Given the chance, fish stocks will rebound. With more careful management, more fish can be caught. In 2014 the pressure will grow to ban deep-sea bottom trawling—Iceland stymied such a move in 2006. In particular, the coming year will see a surge of initiatives for marine protected areas (MPAs). On land, about 12% of the earth is protected in some way. At sea, the figure is under 1%. Yet the proportion will grow fast, as public enthusiasm for ocean conservation increases and new MPAs are declared. Such areas are hugely beneficial when they pro- ▶

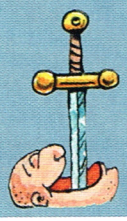
**2014 IN BRIEF**

**Popes John Paul II and John XXIII** are made saints

**Dominic Ziegler**: Asia editor, *The Economist*

**2014 IN BRIEF**

Paramedics brace themselves for February 23rd, **World Sword-Swallowers' day**



tect places where fish come together, breed or raise their young. Most existing MPAs are small and near the coast, within countries' 200-mile (370km) "exclusive economic zones". More ambitious proposals will be for protection far offshore. In 2014 Britain will sign into law the world's biggest MPA: 320,000 square miles around its tiny South Pacific dependency, Pitcairn (population, 55). More high-seas MPAs in the Antarctic will follow.

### Sink or swim

Yet international co-operation over the oceans is held back by poor rules and governance. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, now over three decades old, brought order out of legal chaos, argues Tommy Koh, one of its architects. But lack of compliance has led to "licensed illegality", especially poaching, David Miliband, a British former foreign secretary complains. Regional fisheries managers lack enforcement powers on the high seas, and countries are often too weak or disinclined to police their own waters. Technology could help: for instance, by requiring fishing vessels to carry transponders that reveal their whereabouts. Another idea is to put bar-codes on fish when they are caught, so that shoppers know where they come from.

That will not be enough. For one thing, a healthy fish population does not guarantee a healthy ecosystem; yet the law-of-the-sea convention has no provision for biodiversity. And under the convention and the myriad agencies it has spawned (for regulating shipping, deep-sea mining, cable-laying and much more) consensus rules. Everything moves at the pace of a leaky barge.

All the while, the demands on the oceans—everything from companies that want to bioprospect for new drugs to whale-watching tourists—are proliferating. Not all interests conflict: wind farms may make natural protected areas, for instance. But the management of overlapping interests is growing more complex.

Much is at stake. Hundreds of millions of people, notably in Africa and Asia, depend for their subsistence chiefly upon the sea. Meanwhile, says Lynne Zeitlin Hale of the Nature Conservancy, an American charity, the sea's environmental importance is better understood: for instance, in regulating the climate, recycling oxygen and absorbing carbon dioxide. New rules and institutions are called for, in which the need for consensus on every issue does not hold back best practice. The Global Ocean Commission, of which Mr Miliband is a member, will put out wide-ranging proposals next year on governance and other ocean issues, aiming to straddle differences between rich and poor countries. *The Economist* is doing its bit to foster debate too, with a World Oceans Summit in San Francisco in February. Given the chance, the oceans themselves will do the heavy work of restoring themselves to health. ■

# Hit and miss, 2013

Daniel Franklin

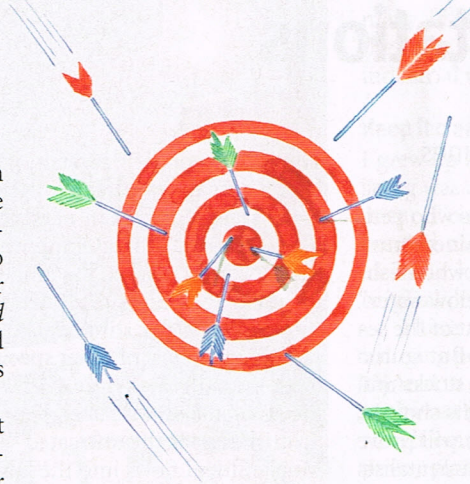
## How did last year's forecasts fare?

The most provocative prediction in last year's edition was that in 2013 the best place to be born would be Switzerland, and the worst Nigeria. It is too soon to tell whether this is true, but for most of the other forecasts in *The World in 2013* the verdict is in. As usual, we had our share of hits and misses—as well as some that fall in between the two.

First, the hits. We were broadly right on the economy. We expected a clearer recovery in America, hardly any growth for the euro area, a decent expansion in China but "drooping" growth in India.

We overlooked the impact Shinzo Abe's policies would have in Japan, but got Britain's growth right. We reckoned its economic prospects were brighter than most people thought. At first, amid talk of a triple-dip recession, our contrarian view looked ill-judged. Then statistical revisions suggested the country might not have had a double dip, let alone a triple one. And Britain's economic numbers have recently been looking up.

Our preview of an international panel's scientific assessment of climate change summed up what its actual report would say a year later. We speculated that Microsoft and Nokia, two losers in the shift from fixed to mobile internet access, might merge in 2013 (in September Microsoft bought Nokia's mobile-phone business). We flagged issues of privacy as a growing problem for companies like Google. But we did not foresee the event that would thrust privacy into the news: revelations from Edward Snowden, a former National Security Agency contractor, about America's mass-surveillance programmes.



**We failed to predict a military coup in Egypt**

Some predictions can prove to be at once right and wrong. We correctly thought, for example, that the elderly Pope Benedict would face daunting difficulties, but did not imagine he would resign and be replaced by the lively Pope Francis. We expected Angela Merkel to win the German election and that a new small party would emerge strongly—but we thought that party would be the Pirates rather than the Eurosceptic Alternative for Germany. We assumed that America would avert a "fiscal cliff" early in the year, but failed to imagine a government shutdown in the autumn. We worried about al-Qaeda's impact in Africa, envisaging battles in the sands of the Sahara (and terrorists duly besieged a gas plant in the Algerian desert in January); but not in a shopping centre in Nairobi.

And the clear misses? They included some big ones. Not for the first time we underestimated the staying power of President Bashar Assad in Syria. We did not foresee the tragic testing of Barack Obama's "red line" on the use of chemical weapons. We failed to predict a military coup in Egypt. We did not mention the winner of Iran's presidential election, Hassan Rohani.

We also missed the protests that spread across many countries in 2013, from Brazil to Turkey to Bulgaria. True, we had given warning of the risk of widespread social unrest in *The World in 2010*. But with forecasts, timing is everything. ■

**Daniel Franklin**: editor, *The World in 2014*